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WILLIAM BENTLEY BISHOP D. D. 1817

Late Rector of the Presbyterian Church at N. Orleans

Engraved by J. H. Smith

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

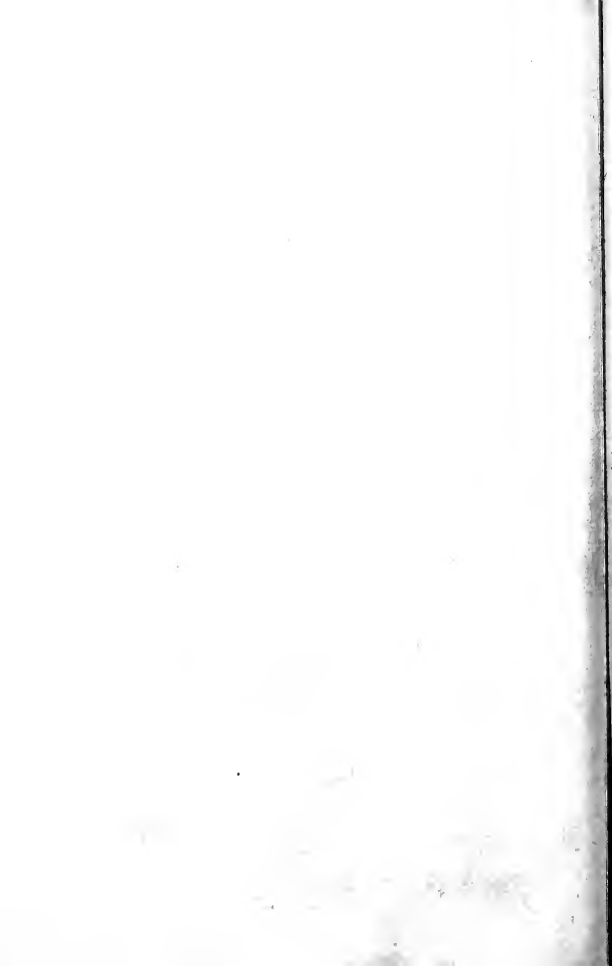
AND

Obituary

OF

REV. SYLVESTER LARNED.

*"The brightest star in evening's train
 Sets earliest in the western main—
 The brightest star in mornings' host
 Scarce ris'n, in brighter beams is lost."*
 James Montgomery.



BIOGRAPHY OF
SYLVESTER LARNED.

THE REV. SYLVESTER LARNED, the subject of this memoir, was born in Pittsfield, (Mass.) August 31st, 1796, and was the son of Col. Simon Larned, an officer of high standing in the American army. It is said that the germ of that commanding eloquence, for which he was so much distinguished in life, began to be seen and felt at the tenderest age. When quite a boy, while sporting with his brother on one occasion, he laid a wager with him that he could make him weep by *talking* to him. There was at that time nothing solemn in their situation or employment. But he commenced his appeal; and such was the mighty power of the young orator's pathos, that in a very short time he actually melted down his brother into unwilling tears; and then, with a wagish taunt, claimed his prize. At the early age of thirteen, he was chosen by his fellow-students of the Academy of Pittsfield, to deliver an oration on the Anniversary of our country's independence. This he did with a self-possession and a power, which surprised even those who admired him most. In his class he led without an effort; always idle, yet always eminent, it became a sub-

ject of great surprise, how this peculiar boy could, by a glance of thought, range his whole department of study, and without ever seeming to fix his attention upon his book, become familiar with its contents.

In his fourteenth year, he became a member of Williams College, (Mass.) but his instability of character in so extreme youth, soon subjected him to the censure of the ruling authorities. He therefore left this Institution; but he afterwards attached himself to Middlebury College, (Vt.) In the early part of his course here, also, he was wild and unsettled. The elements of his character were, by nature, tempestuously strong. His early life was marked by a constant tendency to excess, and his great activity of mind made him impatient of control. It was not until he had reached his senior year, that the hand of God arrested him. Of the particulars of this most important event of his life, and of the steps by which he was led on to this result of mercy, we are almost wholly ignorant. This cannot be too much lamented. In a case so striking, every circumstance would, probably, be eminently interesting and instructive. It is said, however, that his convictions of sin were deep and awful; the work rapid, conclusive, and thorough; and the change truly transforming.

Soon after this, he declared it to be the great purpose of his life to serve God in the holy Ministry. And in pursuance of this determination, after taking his first degree, at the early age of seventeen, he formed a connexion with the Theological Seminary at Andover, in

the autumn of 1813. He left that Institution, however, after the lapse of a single term, and returned home. During the period of his continuance there, which did not exceed a single year, he conducted a Grammar School, carrying on, at the same time, his preparations for the Ministry.

In the autumn of 1815, he was led to form a connexion with this Seminary.* Here every step assumes new interest, and an increasing importance accompanies every development of his unusual character. At this most solemn point, we would gladly surrender the subject to those who were members of the same little band, and who felt, and thought, and acted with him. They, who in the process of preparation knew him here most familiarly, and marked, in the successive stages, the formation of his character, possessed materials, the lack of which renders our best attempts at faithful history extremely imperfect. Yet even to those who were habitually with him, the unbroken uniformity, and noiseless progress of a course of study here, give nothing prominent in which character may be read, but the drift and general effect. Judging in this way, the result upon the whole bore a pleasing testimony to our departed brother's advancement in knowledge and in grace. He was a man of strong feeling, and of much action. Patient assiduity, and uniform habits of mind, were not so conspicuous during his connexion with this Institution. He thought more than he read, he acted and said more

* At Princeton, N. J.

than he thought. His mind was uncommonly independent, original, rapid, and rich; so that he made much of little, and required much less preparation and thought than ordinary men to act his part with effect.

But there was an evident and most promising increase of strength of mind, of knowledge, and of personal piety, during his course of study here. It is pleasing to know, that he was often very actively engaged in doing good around him, while a member of this Institution. To the college he seems especially to have been tenderly drawn. He exerted a great influence over the minds of the youth generally; and it is believed that in more cases than one, he was the honoured instrument of converting to God those who have since preached the Gospel themselves. His religious feelings are said to have been greatly revived within him during the last year of his stay here. He had spent a short period of time in Elizabethtown and Newark, during the work of God in those places in the early months of the year 1817. From these sacred scenes he returned to Princeton deeply revived; and ever after while here, threw much more of the true spirit into all his duties, intellectual and spiritual. It was at this time, especially, that he laboured most faithfully and successfully in the College.

In the summer of 1817 he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of New York. The impression which he made upon the public mind was instantaneous, and very deep. Crowds began immediately to gather around him wherever he preached; overflowing

congregations hung in rapture on his lips, and were melted down under the power of his eloquence. Some have thought that so much popular impression has been made by no man so young, in this country, since the days of Whitefield.

About this time the claims of Louisiana, upon the Christian Church, began to be strongly felt. The standard of Christ Jesus had scarcely ever been erected in the city of New Orleans, though the centre alike of a large population and an immense influence. The Rev. Mr. E. Cornelius,* it is true, had, for a short season, been labouring there with faithfulness, and great effect. His connexion with the city was transient. But he was a *preparer of the way* to the efforts which ensued.

For the work of giving the Gospel a permanent and triumphant location here, a character of eminent enterprise was required. Most persons were as unfit as they were unwilling to attempt it. Larned was selected for it. He acquiesced, and was soon after ordained as an evangelist, for missionary labour in this important field. He very soon set out on his journey thither. Penetrating, in the first place, under the authority of a general mission, as far west as Detroit; he then went directly south, preaching the Gospel as he proceeded through Ohio and

* There was, in many points a peculiar, and very striking resemblance between these lamented servants of God, who have been removed so soon from the field below to their reward on high. It was this resemblance in fervour, boldness, commanding eloquence, and even in the nobility of their personal appearance, which enabled the one so harmoniously to succeed the other in the enterprize at New Orleans.—*The Editor.*

part of Kentucky, until he reached Louisville, of the latter State. Then, along with his fellow-labourer and friend, the Rev. Jeremiah Chamberlain, he left the land, embarked on the Ohio river, and descended it and the Mississippi to New Orleans, touching as he went at the most important points of the country. He reached Orleans in good season, before the departure of the Rev. Mr. Cornelius, so as to derive all possible benefit from the influence which he had already acquired.

The arrival of such a man, under such circumstances, was well calculated to produce an extraordinary impression. A writer in the *Christian Spectator*, who was his friend and fellow-student here, speaking of this important event, says: "On his first arrival in that city, a general and unprecedented interest was awakened by his preaching; and every thing seemed to indicate that Providence had sent him there to produce a great revolution in the character of New Orleans. The uncommon majesty with which he exhibited the truths of the Gospel, the almost magic power by which he entranced and rivetted his hearers, drew after him a multitude composed of all classes, from the highest to the lowest in society. It soon became an object with some of the most respectable and influential gentlemen in the city, to secure his permanent settlement among them; and measures were accordingly adopted to accomplish this design. Mr. Larned listened to their proposals; and, as soon as was convenient, formed a Presbyterian Church, of which he consented to become the pastor."

In the summer of 1818, he made a visit to the North

and East, not only with a view to escape the sickly season of New Orleans, but to procure materials for building a house of worship. During this, the last visit he ever made to his native region, he preached in most of our northern cities, and left an impression of his solemn and overwhelming eloquence, which, it is believed, will not soon be forgotten.

In the autumn of this year, he again set out for New Orleans. Taking his route through the middle and western States, and preaching the Gospel as he went, he again embarked at Louisville, and reached his charge early in the winter. By his persevering efforts he was enabled to prepare for the reception of his congregation a spacious edifice, at the commencement of the next summer. During this season (1819,) he retired from the city to the German coasts, (in its vicinity,) until the prevalence of the epidemic had ceased. Shortly after his return to his flock, he was married to Miss Wier, formerly of Newburyport, Mass.

During the winter of 1819-20 he was invited by the First Presbyterian church, Baltimore, to succeed the Rev. Dr. Inglis; and he was at different times called to Alexandria, Savannah, &c. But he resisted every call, however seducing, and resolved to devote himself to the cause of Christ in Louisiana.

It is highly interesting here to know that he projected for himself a plan of a missionary exploring enterprize into South America, as soon as he could in safety leave his people for so long a time. But the God of Heaven had differently ordered. When the sickly season, at

which he had been accustomed to retire from the ravages of death, came on, he resolved to remain behind, and (if the God of Providence should please,) to perish with the poor of his people, who could not flee the city. Doubtless his soul was melted at the thought, that while death was making havoc of this devoted population, none remained behind when he was absent to point the dying sinner to the Saviour. The reflection must have moved him, that in affliction this hardened people might be tender; and the suspicion of having been driven by fear to fly from danger, he knew, with a people who measure every thing by courage, might have injured the cause of his Master more than even his life would benefit it. Whatever the motive, he resolved to meet the issue at his post, and if called to die, to die upon the field.

Until August, he was exceedingly well, and high hopes were cherished that the city would be spared the usual visitation of malignant fever. But they soon were awakened from these illusive hopes by its sudden appearance in the most awful form. Larned was indefatigable in his attentions to the sick and dying. It was surprising, and was made a subject of remark, how soon he found out even the afflicted strangers in the city who had been overtaken by this destructive malady.

The last Sabbath of August had been appointed by him as a day of public humiliation among his people, and prayer to God that he would deliver the devoted city from the awful visitation under which it groaned. He met his people in the morning, and also in the afternoon, of that solemn day. It was for the last time! Be-

fore its close, he was laid prostrate by a most violent attack of the fever. It soon broke his strength; it, for a season, shook the powers of his mind; and on August 31st he breathed his last! Such was the wild distraction of grief and wo around him, that scarce a fact in regard to his last hours has been treasured for the world. When the delirium of death was not on him, he was firm and collected. When most aware of his danger, he was most assured of his Saviour's presence and power; and in the language of the writer quoted above, "He was enabled to bear his dying testimony to the excellence of that religion which it had been his delightful employment to preach to others." As he approached the final conflict, he was calm and composed, and he left the world with the prospect of entering on an exceeding great reward.

His death cast the deepest gloom over the widowed city, and produced a strong sensation in almost every part of the nation. In his native region, the public grief was strikingly exhibited: and a sacred enthusiasm still kindles there, at the mention of his name!

In sketching a character so blended and peculiar, there is no small difficulty in adjusting its features so as to be just, without appearing sometimes extravagant, and sometimes severe. Of his intellect, it may be said, its most striking feature was *active power*. He was not remarkable for profound thought, or for very accurate acquirement. But every effort he made on every subject to which he chose intensely to direct his attention, bore witness that this was not owing to a want of mental

power, but of mental patience. The fervour of his feelings often made his mind discursive. His imagination was extremely bold, vivid, and impatient of control: and it is probable that his more solid qualities suffered from these propensities. It was in truth natural for him thus to be seduced by powers exerting such a controlling influence over the passions of men. The paths of cool inquiry would appear a circuitous route to the human mind, to him who, by a single effort of irresistible pathos, could transfuse his spirit through every auditor, and break the heart in pieces at a blow. His eloquence was chaste, ardent, and commanding. If it had a fault, there was too much sentiment in it, and too little thought; and the discerning hearer was sometimes called to regret that the dress of a manner almost unrivalled was not always filled up by an equal power and richness of matter. When he first appeared as a Minister of the Gospel, (as he himself has owned) he was led to bestow too much attention on what he thought most likely to attract the mass of men; we allude to his style of writing, and mode of illustrating divine truth. But when he became a settled pastor, he found that eloquence would not feed his people. A great revolution immediately took place in his style of instruction. He became more plain, more didactic, and evangelical; and the consequence was, that while they who had been attracted by human power, were displeased, the sheep of the fold found more of that food which came down from above.

His piety, though sincere, was not of an order com-

mensurate with the other features of his character. He was, perhaps, too much a man of frames, both in spiritual and intellectual things. He depended too much on feeling. When roused, he was remarkable for his power in prayer; and, whenever he spoke in public, much of the effect he produced, was by a strong tide of feeling, which, in its warm flow, melted down whatever it touched.

Sometimes he sunk into great lethargy and inaction of Christian spirit; but again he would rise to a height of glowing zeal, and long continued exertion, in his Master's cause.

His natural constitution of character was impulsive, and somewhat unstable, and might be expected to manifest itself in his religious life. Probably, too, those fluctuations of feeling to which all Christians are subject, were more exposed upon the surface of a character which carried with it no power or purpose of concealment, but lived out every emotion to the eye of man. And in an age of superficial piety, a part of the censure which these remarks may seem to involve, attaches itself to the day in which he lived.

Yet there are written on the hearts of all his Christian friends, many sacred evidences of his Christian character and worth: and every day he lived, continued to strengthen their confidence and exalt their hopes.

The strength of his nerves and personal courage was surprisingly great. It is related, that among his friends in New Orleans, he had one, a man of much personal prowess himself, who, in a fit of insanity, to which he

was subject, formed the design of taking Larned's life. This he kept a profound secret; and Larned, not aware of his friend's bewildered state of mind, was one day asked by him to take a walk into the country. He consented, set out, and had walked far out of view, when, to his amazement, the madman drew a dagger from his breast, and in a furious tone, ordered him to prepare to die! Larned was unarmed, but not intimidated, or forsaken by his presence of mind. Erecting himself before the armed madman in all the majesty of his bold and striking appearance, he exclaimed, "In the name of the Almighty, I defy you." His power of voice and manner, and his undaunted boldness, disarmed the man at once: the dagger fell from his hand; and he led him, like a harmless child, back to the city!

Such, in the freedom of truth, is the character of one of the most interesting and extraordinary young men who have ever appeared in our country. And now that he has been cut down, who will meet the foe in the field in which he fell? who will gather the scattered flock, and come forth in that city, great and guilty, to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty?

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY,

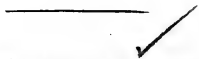
AT THE

ANNUAL EXAMINATION OF THE STUDENTS

OF THE

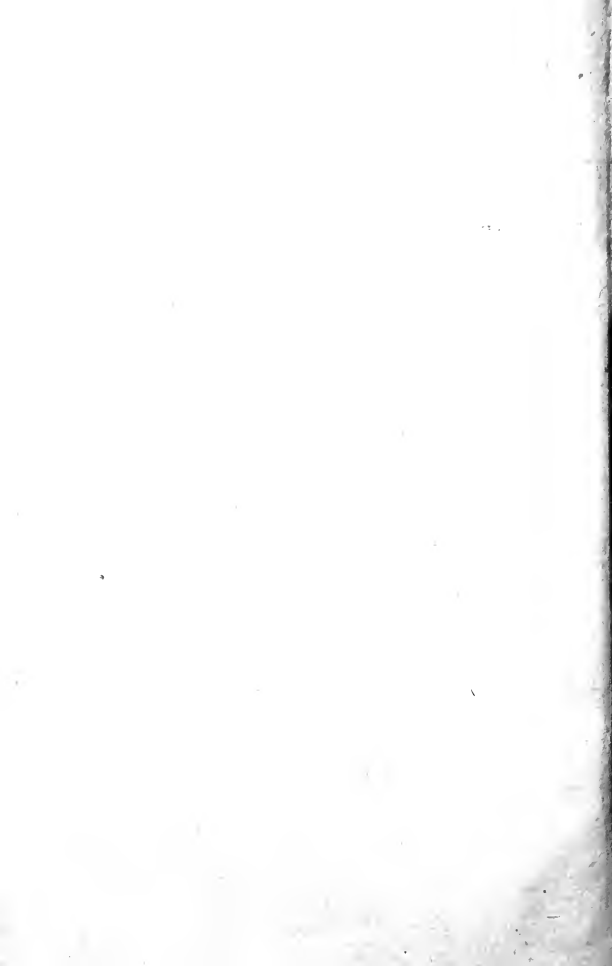
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,

MAY, 1832.



BY THE REV. GARDINER SPRING, D.D.

Pastor of the Brick Church, New York.



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